

Anti-Slavery Office,  
New York, 28 Aug., 1862.

101

Dear Garrison,

I wish I could have a  
good talk with you on some points  
connected the cause and our duties  
to it, especially as editors. It is diffi-  
cult to have a satisfactory confer-  
ence by writing, ~~and~~ <sup>but</sup> it is of some  
importance, I think, that we should have  
a concurrence of judgment as to  
the course best to be pursued in  
respect to the class in our ranks  
(or perhaps I should say out instead  
of in) whom I may ~~designate~~ <sup>indicate</sup> with  
sufficient accuracy by calling them  
grumblers ~~and~~ <sup>or</sup> masplots, whichever  
you choose. The subject is brought  
to my attention now by the controversy

Don't forget to send back the copy of my letter to Howard.



between Mr. Howland and Mr.  
May in the Liberator. Howland  
sent me his first letter, shabbily with-  
holding the information that he had  
also sent it to you, in the hope by  
that trick to get both papers into  
the controversy. As it was not pos-  
sible for me to consult you, Mr.  
May, or any body else qualified to  
advise me, I wrote to Howland,  
acknowledging the receipt of his letter,  
and telling him, in reply to his  
urgent request for its publica-  
tion that very week as important,  
that I could see no reason for  
haste, and should therefore  
take time to inquire what Mr.  
May had actually said and  
done, and then do as I might



think best for the cause. I knew  
that Howland had had a quar-  
rel with ~~Mr~~ May, and I thought  
that I saw evidence of too much  
haste, <sup>on his part</sup> in making an assault.  
At the same time I sent Howland's  
communication to Mr. May, asking  
him what he had to say in  
reply or explanation; my thought  
being that I would print the  
attack and the reply in the same  
paper, and <sup>thus</sup> make an end of the  
matter. Mr. May wrote that he  
had seen Howland's article in  
your hands, and that he had  
told you not to hesitate, on his  
account, to print it; and he sent  
me at the same time a copy of the  
reply he had written for the



Liberator, leaving me to act on my  
own judgment in printing or de-  
clining to print both the articles.  
The matter standing thus, I sent  
Howland a letter, of which I will  
enclose a copy in this (asking  
you to return it to me without  
fail, after reading it). This is what  
Howland calls "an unkind personal  
note" to himself. <sup>He carefully conceals</sup> ~~carefully~~ <sup>entirely</sup>  
the ground on which I had refused  
to publish <sup>his</sup> article, ~~and~~ hoping, doubt-  
less, to compel me to take part  
in the controversy. He will be  
disappointed, however, for I shall  
not reply to his personal allusion  
in the Standard or anywhere else.  
It is better, I think, to bear his fling in  
silence than to occupy even a  
stickfull of room in explanations



on a matter of so little importance.

<sup>102</sup> I believe I have more confidence in your judgment, deliberately formed, on any question of editorial duty or expediency, than in my own; and perhaps you did what was best in printing Howland's article. But if I could have seen you while you had the matter under consideration, I would have suggested the omission of the letter, and the publication of a paragraph in spirit like this:

"We have received from Mr. Joseph A. Howland a letter ~~criticizing~~ criticizing Rev. Samuel May, Jr., for remarks he is reported to have made in the war meeting recently held at Leicester. Mr.



May, in the exercise of his own  
conscientious judgment, encour-  
aged enlistments in the army.  
Mr. Howland thinks he acted in-  
consistently and wrongly in  
so doing. Let each "be fully per-  
suaded in his own mind." We  
do not see that we are called  
upon, while subjects of much  
higher importance are pressing  
upon our space, to surrender  
our columns for a controversy  
about it."

Would not that have been  
fair? It seems to me that it would,  
and I think it is a mistake to  
offer such easy facilities for per-  
sonal controversy on any and



every topic that such men as  
Howland may choose to thrust  
upon us. But, as I said before,  
you may have judged wisely  
in printing Howland's first letter &  
May's reply. I cannot think,  
however, that it was wise to  
let the controversy go a step  
further; or even if it was best  
to let Howland speak again, that  
it was fair to permit him to  
travel out of the original record  
and bring the Standard into  
the case. That portion of his letter,  
at least, ought to have been  
struck out as irrelevant to the  
issue before the readers of the  
Liberator.

I say this, not because I care



a fig for the allusion to myself, but  
on the score of sound principle,  
<sup>applicable</sup> ~~is applicable~~ to such cases. In  
short, it seems to me, that in our  
fear of assaults from such quarters,  
and in our anxiety to preserve intact  
the largest freedom of discussion, we  
are in danger of overlooking the  
limitations ~~of too~~ imposed by com-  
mon sense upon ~~every thing~~ and  
running the thing into the ground.  
It certainly is not to be admitted, for  
a moment, that Howland, or any-  
body else, has the right, under any  
and all circumstances, at his own  
discretion, and without regard to  
space and time, to arraign any  
servant of the cause in our  
papers and put him upon a  
public defence ~~for~~ of his con-  
sistency and integrity. And if his



right in this particular is limited,  
 what are the limitations? and  
 when should they be insisted upon?

Howland's <sup>last</sup> letter, I see, is  
 sent for the Journal of Commerce  
 and other pro-slavery sheets. I con-  
 fess it annoys me to see one,  
 accounted an Abolitionist of  
 our school, thus giving aid  
 and comfort to the enemy.

The other day, in printing a  
 report of Harriet Powell's first  
 of August speech, I drew my  
 pen across these words:

"It [the effort to maintain both  
 slavery and the Union] has made  
 Jefferson Davis really the President of  
 the whole country, with Lincoln as  
 a Northern Secretary—thus as a neces-



city while thus serving slavery.  
Beauregard is undoubtedly a  
great general, but he has not ser-  
ved the Confederate cause with  
one-half as effectively as have  
McClellan and Halleck. Their  
eminent services fully entitle  
them to distinguished consideration  
and promotion at the hands of  
the Confederate government."

At the moment when  
Plumb was in durance, and I  
knew that the secession plotters  
were watching the Standard  
to find sentences that they could  
wrest from their context for  
the purpose of exciting and  
misleading the rabble, and  
making ~~some~~ up a plausible



case against us, in the hope of  
getting our papers suppressed,  
I thought it would be wiser  
to omit these somewhat ex-  
travagant words. I relied on  
Baron's good sense to ap-  
preciate my reasons for so  
doing. But I fear, from the  
tone of a letter just received  
from him, that he is disposed  
to make an issue, as if the  
right of free speech had been  
infracted. Could anything be  
more absurd?

For my part, I do not  
mean to publish anything, reason-  
ing, speech, or letter, that can fairly



be construed as designed to discourage enlistments. It would, it seems to me, be utter foolhardiness, for us, under present circumstances, to run into the trap set only for Secessionists, but into which they are adroitly attempting to lead us. Have we not ample scope and verge for discussion and criticism without thus giving aid and comfort to our worst enemies? I think so.

This week there is a Convention at Ellenville, Ulster Co., N. Y., at which Parker Pillsbury, Mrs. Rose, Susan Anthony and Aaron Powell are to be present. I fear they will talk and act



very foolishly, making up a re-  
 cord for the Standard that,  
 if printed, will give comfort  
 to the pro-slavery party. What,  
 in that case, shall I do? Am I bound to  
 publish whatever they may  
 choose to send, even if I think  
 they openly disregard and  
 defy the order of the War  
 Department, and hazard  
 the very existence of the paper?  
 Or may I exercise a sound  
 discretion in the ~~the~~ case and  
 omit such portions of the  
 proceedings as I may think  
 fairly objectionable? I am  
 not without apprehension



that P. P., who will doubtless  
write the resolutions and  
give tone to the whole affair,  
may make an open issue  
with me, knowing the ground  
I have taken. I wish you and  
I ~~could~~ be together when the  
report comes, that I might  
have the benefit of your  
judgment.

Will you not write me  
within a day or two, telling me  
how far you agree with  
me in what I have said,  
and in what respects you  
dissent? I really need your  
counsel, though I hate to



tax you to write, or to consume  
a moment of your precious  
time. My position here is pe-  
culiar. If the Standard were  
my paper, as the Liberator is  
yours, the case would be dif-  
ferent. Others being in a sense  
responsible for what I may  
do, I am particularly anxious  
to act wisely.

Yours, truly,

Oliver Johnson.

Will you not send me  
your Williamstown address? I  
want to print it. O. J.



28. July, Aug. 28, 1862.

Don't look at the end of the road.